



NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: D.J. Caulfield, (202) 205-6740

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VICE PRESIDENT ANNOUNCES PLAN TO HELP WOMEN-OWNED FIRMS WIN FEDERAL CONTRACTS

WASHINGTON – Vice President Al Gore unveiled a new streamlined federal contracting plan, developed by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), that gives women-owned businesses a better chance of winning federal contracts.

“For too long, women-owned businesses haven’t received their fair share of federal contracts,” the Vice President said Wednesday in New Hampshire. “This effort will not only help these businesses, but will help the government as well by bringing their expertise to the federal market.”

The federal government spends about \$200 billion annually buying goods and services. While women own and operate nearly 40 percent of all small companies, women-owned firms receive roughly 2 percent of federal procurement contracts. The Clinton-Gore Administration has set a goal of more than doubling women’s share of federal contracts to 5 percent.

SBA Administrator Aida Alvarez said: “This new streamlined approach to federal contracting places women-owned and small, disadvantaged businesses in a position to tap a pool of contracts that approaches \$20 billion. It’s a two-way benefit, because with this new procedure, the agency can complete the contract in a matter of days.”

The SBA plan, which affects the pool of contracts for services ranging from \$25,000 to \$100,000, offers procurement officers the chance to shave weeks off normal contracting procedures. Agencies are currently required to publish their contracting opportunities in the *Commerce Business Daily*, wait 30 days to receive bids, and then evaluate all bids. Basic contract awards typically take a minimum 45 days. More detailed contracts can take much longer.

Under the new plan, the SBA will grant a waiver permitting use of a simplified process if a contracting officer solicits bid information from five small businesses – including one woman-owned firm and one small disadvantaged business. These solicitations will be done quickly, cutting the time it takes to identify and award the contract to just a few days. The new process should save time and money in the contracting process.

The SBA is also encouraging contracting officers to use the agency's Pro-Net database. This is an Internet-based list of more than 177,000 firms willing to do business with the federal government. With Pro-Net, a contracting officer can search for qualified companies using any number of criteria, including whether the firm is women-owned or disadvantaged.

“No longer will a federal contractor be able to say ‘I couldn’t find a qualified woman,’” said Administrator Alvarez. “This initiative should go a long way toward achieving the five percent goal and closing the opportunity.”

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The U.S. Small Business Administration, established in 1953, provides financial, technical and management assistance to help Americans start, run, and grow their businesses. With a portfolio of business loans, loan guarantees and disaster loans worth more than \$45 billion, the SBA is the nation's largest single financial backer of small businesses. Last year, the SBA offered management and technical assistance to more than one million small business owners. The SBA also plays a major role in the government's disaster relief efforts by making low-interest recovery loans to both homeowners and businesses.

America's 23 million small businesses employ more than 50 percent of the private workforce, generate more than half of the nation's gross domestic product, and are the principal source of new jobs in the U.S. economy.